



I cry out for magic.

My last, best hope was to vomit; but even hugging the toilet bowl with a toothbrush wedged down my throat, I got nothing. Only dry heaves and sore knees.

Ah well, it was a long shot anyway. I wouldn't try that stunt anymore except for on the few times it has worked, it's been absolute magic. Nothing better than a purge to flush out the toxins.

Not tonight, however. Tonight, it will be all about suffering.

Four in the morning. Wambaugh's Drinkers' Hour. It's gin this time, so the pain is more acute. Vodka hurts less, but it brings nightmares. Choosing between the two has become my daily balancing act of terror vs. pain.

Tonight, I chose pain.

I'm in the upstairs guest bedroom, computer on, listening to music my Internet friend emailed. A tribute album called *Ronnie James Dio - This Is Your Life*.

Good stuff. *Great* stuff. I plug in and put on headphones so I can get a louder volume without fear of waking the house.

The house. Such bullshit. The house is only my wife, sleeping in the sitting room on a bizarre setup of mattresses and sofas she's pieced together to provide maximum safety and comfort for someone who is prone to falling off a bed. Don't ask.

I email my friend thanking him for the download. *Rawk!* I write, \m/ And then I die a little inside from using web-slang. Slang-slang is bad enough, but web-slang? Say I'm using it ironically.

To my everlasting credit, however, I've never once typed the letters *LOL*.

Well. Except just now. And it is possible that, at some point during my long and ne'er-do-well life, I've had an occasion to type out the word *lollipop*. But you know what I mean.

I married a mutant. Nothing as glamorous as claws shooting from her fists or lasers beams for eyes. No, she inherited a rouge cytosine-adenine-guanin (CAG) sequence from her mother. This mutant strand of DNA hyper-actively repeats itself, basically becoming a sort of fire extinguisher on the brain, coating specific sections, dampening them, making them non-responsive and erratic. It is actually a very ugly, fatal genetic disorder.

For over fifteen years we watched her mother die from this. Let me repeat that and you think about it for a while. Fifteen. Fucking. Years.

Bedridden. Incoherent. Every day a little bit less human; a little bit more disease. For fifteen.... more than fifteen... years.

Great. Now my eyes feel as red and hot as laser beams.

Anyway, my wife knows enough about the disease to know her exposure - hell, she's watched House - and she's made it abundantly clear that she is not capable of confronting it. She doesn't want to know she has it - ever. Never ever. No testing, nope. No. She just can't have it and that's the end of the story.

And I cannot blame her.

My Internet friend who sent me this album used to be my student, then my employee, two decades ago when I taught classes and ran the computer labs at the Art Institute of Houston. Back then, he was one of the first to put his entire life on the Internet - building and maintaining a personal website before blogging was even a thing, and way before Facebook. I haven't seen him in person in over a decade.

We have a Kurzweilian transcendent friendship. I could write a computer program to repeatedly scan the Internet for new information on 80s hair and heavy metal bands, send the links to his email address with a randomly generated personalized message based on a logarithm containing the words and phrases: *rawk*, *\mm/*, *thought they were dead*, and *disco sucks*.

Were he to do the same, our friendship could last well beyond our deaths; indeed, until the very end of the planet earth.

Neat.

I cry out for magic.

My wife. She doesn't have her mother's disease; I've told you that, right? No, she's fine. Except that her speech is slurred, often she can't find words, and it is hard to have conversations with her because she doesn't understand you and, for God's sake, what the hell is she talking about now?

And she twitches. A lot. You can't just hand her something. You must place it firmly in her grasp, hold it there, and make sure she's got it before letting go.

After she's done eating, bring the mop and bucket because there will be more food on the floor than went in her mouth. And - this is a lot of fun - more often than not, while she's eating or drinking, she'll have trouble swallowing and choke and gag a lot.

But she's fine. Really.

I'm reminded of a Twilight Zone episode - or maybe it was a comic in an old horror magazine; I'm thinking Tales from the Crypt - where a bed-ridden wife is convinced her husband is a vampire because of his odd behavior - staying out all night, coming home with blood on his clothes. As it turns out, she is the vampire and the husband is out killing victims to keep her fed while convincing her she is drinking juice, not blood. He loves her so much, you see, he can't bring himself to let her know she's the one who is undead.

I feel you, brother.

Goddamn but this is good music! Okay, yes, I'm drunk and in pain and that might not make for the most lucid assessment, but still. *Rawk!*

Sorry.

Another reason it might sound so good to me is that I haven't heard many of these songs before; and the ones I have, I must admit, I didn't appreciate them at the time. I wasn't a big Dio fan. How I would like to justify that fact would be to look down my nose and proclaim that his mystic, quasi-Satanic pretense was childish and belied talent. It was foolishness. A crass marketing gimmick. Bullshit.

The truth, however, is that it scared the hell out of me.

I remember my friend showing me the Holy Diver album at the record store: that demon killing the priest with a chain in one hand and the other making the evil eye? Then he turned the cover upside-down, and the word Dio became Devil...? Oh, hell no.

I cry out for magic.

As a child, I was an altar boy at my Catholic church. When I admit that now, I must follow up with a joke - *but I was a very ugly child, so there was never any danger. Or, but I wasn't very popular, and my priest figured he could do better.*

Har har.

For the record, my priest never did molest me. Never even anything untoward. The worse you could say about him is that he was an obvious drunk (and I can't call that kettle black). Don't mistake this for an apology or an equivocation for the Catholic church. The cover up of abuse was disgusting. Also - and you can probably see this coming based on my circumstance - fuck God that fucking cunt and all the bullshit he puts us through. HD? Really? Oh, fuck you twice, bitch.

All that aside, I have to say, there was magic on the altar.

The dress, the sacraments. Holding the tray to catch any of the body-of-Christ that may dribble from tired lips on a Sunday morning.

In the preface of Boy's Life, Robert R. McCammon wrote that the process of growing up is losing magic. Piece by piece.

But I can remember donning the robes and ringing the bells. I still remember that magic.

I cry out for magic.

It was two years ago that I became certain my wife had inherited the disease. Up until that point, it had been a game of percentages: well, maybe, 80%, 90% sure....

Do your demon, do they ever let you go?

Two years ago my demons grabbed me by the balls and they're still clenching.

My wife is dying of a disease most foul and execrable and every day I lie and disseminate and drink. When I can no longer do these things? What will happen?

And the magic was true and strong.

I regret misjudging Ronnie James Dio. Dio/Devil. A marketing gimmick? Perhaps. But not crass. What the hell? Didn't I own every Alice Cooper album? Anyway, RJD's songs are magic; they are beautiful. I've moved on from the tribute album to youtube where I've found his original records in their entirety. So much better. The man's voice is a symphony

I cry out for magic.

A mutant strain of DNA on a reckless course of reproduction....

What does that even mean?

75 years ago, it was considered insanity and the "suitable case for treatment" was put in a sanitarium for observation and abuse.

150 years ago, it was a curse. Black magic. Something a witch or God himself saddled upon your family. The only cure was to drown the recipient of the whammy in the ocean or burn the unfortunate victim on a pyre,

Today it is just science. That special kind of "fuck you, you're shit out of luck" science.

Well, what if I like the magic better? What if I like the thought that sometime, generations ago, a hook-nosed, hump-backed alchemist pointed a broken finger at the pater of the clan and said, "may the children of your children's children children all die from madness and chorea."

Then couldn't I cry out for magic to make it all go away?

"Magic", I whisper.

Would I sell my soul to a demon - or even the Devil himself - to have my wife back? To have her healthy and normal? To talk with her again - a sensible conversation about

anything; how blue the sky or how soft the grass? To hold her hand without feeling the terrible tremors that constantly rack her body?

Yes, yes. A thousand times yes.

"Magic," I say, louder.

Suddenly the room grows dark. Shadows thicken and crawl from the corners of the ceiling, spilling over the floor. Creeping up on me. Is it that pre-dawn augury where everything bleeds black before the sun chases away the night?

"Magic!" I cry out.

Just in case it is something else.

END